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ABSTRACT

The success of the United States as a nation has depended on establishing a common language, loyalty, and culture. To achieve functional normalcy among our citizens there has been an ongoing process of single culture socialization carried out predominantly through systems of public schools. But whether it is necessary or desirable to establish a nonculturally differentiated mass by means of cultural conversion and absorption needs to be examined. In response to genuine cultural variety there is a new sense of pluralism which seeks to establish a condition of parity among ethnic groups. The assumption of the new pluralism is that people will be made aware of the multicultural characteristics of American life. This touches directly upon the role of the educational system of facilitating intercultural communication. The goal of our schools must be to assist people in learning self and enable them to respect others by showing the richness inherent in the different cultural senses of reality. There is a need not only for ethnic studies programs but for an ethnicity in education through which an intercultural dimension pervades the entire curriculum.
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ETHNICITY AND EDUCATION:

THE INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION

by

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P R E F A C E

This paper is one in a series to be published by the Research Committee of the Urban Appalachian Council as part of our effort to document the urban and rural realities of Appalachian life.

In 1972, the Urban Appalachian Council was organized to act as a regional resource and educational center for Appalachian affairs and to promote pride in cultural heritage among Appalachians in an urban setting.

The Urban Appalachian Council functions as advocate and catalyst. It is a fundamental commitment to the concept of cultural pluralism which directs our work in research, advocacy, community organization, cultural affirmation and program development.

There is a need for a new pluralism that would allow each individual to choose whether, when, and how to deal with the ethnic factor in his personal and communal life.

Irving Levine
Judith Herman

ETHNICITY AND EDUCATION: THE INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION

One of the functions of education is to enable individuals to communicate effectively with each other. School systems are designed to give people the verbal, artistic, and mathematical means to communicate with one another. There is, however, one area of communication receiving renewed and needed emphasis in our society which is largely overlooked in our schools: intercultural communication.

Historically the United States has been an unique blend of various racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. But our success as a nation has depended on a certain consistency in establishing a common language, a common loyalty, a common culcure; increasing industrialization calls for laborers who are as homogeneous and interchangable on the production line as are some of the objects they produce. To achieve this functional normalcy among our citizens there has been an ongoing process of single culture socialization carried out predominantly through our system of public schools. (c.f. Handlin, 1970.) Obviously a certain degree of "Americanization" is necessary and desirable for national economic and political survival. But whether it is necessary or desirable to establish a non-culturally differentiated mass, a superculture, by means of cultural conversion and absorbtion needs to be examined.

A representative critique of the universalist trend in American society has been voiced by Congressman Roman Pucinski: "Through the pressures for cultural assimilation, American society has oversold the value of homogenization. We have displayed a remarkable willingness to sacrifice the richness of ethnic diversity in a pluralistic society for the sake of a bland uniformity. And in the process we have precipitated a crisis in values often bewildering to the individual and detrimental to the purpose of the nation." (Wenk, Tomasi, and Baroni, 1972.)

Ethnic groups in our society are people with special characterstics, needs and dreams. The symbols and myths which inform their lives are as unique as their values, instincts and imagination, none of which are necessarily congruent with dominant American social styles. Such cultural diversity can no longer be considered symptomatic of social pathology: "The persistence of ethnicity has for some time been treated by sociologists as dysfunctional since it prevents the emergence of 'rational' universal values. But this charge may be turned around: the emergence of 'rational' universal values is dysfunctional since it detaches persons from the integration of personality that can be achieved only in historic symbolic communities...the world is mediated to human persons through language and culture, that is, through ethnic belonging." (Novak, 1972.)

Personal identity and self-respect derives in a certain measure from awareness and acceptance of oneself, one's family, and one's origin. An individual's culture is a way of life, a set of customs that gives one the comfortable expectation of knowing what will happen next in one's own life, knowing that there are others who share one's own system of values and perception of reality, one's language, taste in food, style of celebration. (c.f. Glazer, 1971.)

In response to the genuine cultural variety within our nation there is a new sense of pluralism developing which seeks to establish a condition of parity among ethnic groups in our society. In contrast to cultural condenscention it sees all cultures as equally worthy, equally due respect: "The new pluralism is a social process which accepts individual and group uniqueness, which allows for balance between identification with a small group and committment to the society as a whole, and in which individuals who do not wish to identify with

any group are also freely accepted." (Levine quoted in Seifer, 1973.) The new pluralism basically establishes a choice where before none existed; people, aware of their own cultural heritage and ethnic identity, are free to choose their own cultural lifestyles, avoiding the tribalism and isolation of the ghetto and lack of ethnic identity so prevalent in suburban society. "The underlying process of cultural pluralism is not survival and transmission of existing cultures, either dominant or oppressed. Rather the process is to know and choose whatever legitimate values and ways of living are self-fulfilling." (Carpenter and Torney, 1974.) The freedom to make an intelligent choice is substantially what cultural pluralism is all about.

The assumption of the new pluralism is that people will be made aware of the multicultural characteristics of American life. This touches directly upon the role of the educational system in facilitating intercultural communication. After the family, the schools are the most important factor in giving children a cultural awareness which can result in human development and healthy intergroup relations among adults. But the task is a difficult one, requiring skillful and sensitive approaches. "Historical people grow like hedges: concretely, contingently, thickly, in all directions, in ways that are entangled, dense, and labyrinthine...A people carries with it prejudices, customs, habits, ways of perceiving and imagining and acting. All these can be given new shape and new direction. But one changes them only respectfully, with the love and subtlety of a true gardner...To treat a people as a people is not, therefore, to be reactionary or to rest with the status quo. It is to respect what one would shape." (Novak, 1971.)

The goal of our schools can no longer be the indoctrination of ethnic and minority groups into the prevalent Anglo-suburban culture but to assist people in learning self-respect and enable them to respect others by showing the richness inherent in the different cultural senses of reality. It has been noted that: "Education is best when it is a combination of ethnic and universal. Every child should have an education in his own ethnic tradition and also an experimental exposure to the ethnic traditions of others." (Novak, 1971.) There is a real need for the study of individual ethnic heritages to heighten personal awareness and identity as well as comparative studies in order to develop in students trust and empathy with people of different domestic and foreign cultures.

Some criticize cultural pluralism as a concept which will support divisiveness and extreme polarization among people of the same nation. It is a caveat well taken but not necessarily a tragic flaw: "Mishandled, the ethnic studies issue can deteriorate into each group's demand for unreasonable separateness and a struggle for scarce educational dollars. On the other hand, if ethnic studies programs are formulated with 'bridge-building' as well as ethnic identity in mind, they can go beyond the 'contributions' approach and provide much-needed knowledge about the nature of American group life. Moreover, such programs should contain an emotional, effective component which helps children come to terms with their individual and group identity, and thus enhance both self-image and intergroup relations." (Levine and Herman, "Search for Identity in Blue-Collar America," 1972.) It is necessary for each group to attain a basic selfawareness and sense of identity before beginning to build coalitions with other ethnic or minority groups; to eliminate this important first step is to invite failure when the time comes to work together on a larger scale.

There is a need not only for ethnic studies programs but for an ethnicity in education through which an intercultural dimension pervades the entire curriculum. The school itself must be an intercultural experience, with teachers aware of their

own ethnic roots as well as the cultural context of their students. The National Study of School Evaluation concludes: "...while education for pluralism should permeate the entire school, a specific program design must be developed to give direction and thrust to the effort. This program should encompass staffing, the curriculum, student/staff relationships, the extracurricular program, teaching methods, personal interactions within the school, the extention of the school into the community--all aspects of the school's operations." (National Study of School Evaluation, 1974.)

Ethnicity in education means investigation of our roots and history, not isolation from them. It offers resources to the imagination, notes differences and respects them as strength. Schools can no longer be considered melting pots for deculturizing and assimilating immigrant and migrant children into a super-culture. "Our developing society, then, rather than reflecting a single, monolithic culture, will consist of many ethnocentric groups and many variant patterns of l#fe. They will exist in dynamic yet relatively harmonious tension with each other. We indeed shall be one people, but the individual strands making up our nation will remain distinctive, with no thought of subordinating one to another." (National Study for School Evaluation, 1974.) This is the intercultural dimension which must be developed in our educational system.

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